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ICONOGRAPHIC ORIGINS OF GAṆEŚA
AND THE EVIDENCE OF THE INDO-GREEK COINAGE

I. *Introductory*¹

As is well known, Gaṇeśa is among the latest deities to be admitted to the Brahmanic pantheon. He is one of the most universally adored of all the Hindu gods and his image is found in practically every part of India. The popularity of Gaṇeśa extended to Nepal and Chinese Turkistan and crossed the seas to Sri Lanka, Java, Bali and Borneo, while his worship is also not unknown in Tibet, Burma, Thailand, and Japan. In India Gaṇeśa's image appeared not only suddenly but already in the classic form by which he is identified from the 5th century up to the present day. It seems incredible that the Gupta sculptures of Gaṇeśa should have been created independently, without the inspiration of transitional forms. Yet it is true that no image of an elephant-headed deity has been discovered which could be placed unquestionably earlier than the 5th century. The discovery of two images of Gaṇeśa in Afghanistan² also did not take back the antiquity much before the Gupta period. The marble image at Sakardhar (Shankardhar), ten miles north of Kabul, has been dated in the 4th century on stylistic grounds and may belong to the transitional style of art between the Kuśāṇa and Gupta periods. If this is so, this image may be treated

¹ This introductory survey draws upon Alice Getty's *Gaṇeśa, A Monograph on the Elephant-faced God*, Oxford, 1935. Also see A. K. Narain, «On the Earliest Gaṇeśa», *Senarat Paranavithana Commemoration Volume*, ed. Leelananda Prematilake Karthisu Indrapala and J. E. van Lohuizen-de Leeuw, Leiden, 1978 pp. 162-66.

² G. Tucci, «Preliminary Report on an Archaeological Survey in Swat», *EW*, 9, 4, 1958, pp. 279-328; see figure 40 on p. 323; and R. C. Agrawala, «Orthvareta Gaṇeśa from Afghanistan», *EW*, 18, Nos. 1-2, 1968, pp. 166-68; M. K. Dhavalikar, «A Note on Two Gaṇeśa Statues from Afghanistan», *EW*, 21, Nos. 3-4, 1971, pp. 331-36.

as the earliest full representation of Gaṇeśa³. It is interesting to note that the earliest dated image of Gaṇeśa is found in China⁴.

An examination of literary sources also indicates that there is no trace of a Gaṇeśa cult in India before the 5th century A. D. The elephant-headed deity does not figure in the epic pantheon. The worship of Gaṇapati-Vināyaka is believed to have been started by the end of the 6th century⁵. The earliest mention of the god can be found in the *Yajñavalkya-smṛiti*⁶, probably written in the 6th century A. D.; but no reference to Gaṇeśa as an elephant-headed deity is to be found until the 8th century, when in the opening stanzas of the *Mālatīmādhava*, he is described as having the face of an elephant⁷.

The question has remained unsolved as to how this type, i.e., the combination of the head of an elephant and a fat Yakṣa-shaped body sprung into existence and affirmed itself without sensible change from the 5th – or even 4th century A. D. – to the present day. The Puranic stories about the origin of Gaṇeśa reflect the perplexity in which his composite figure involved the authors of these texts. This is clear from their efforts to provide him with a divine ancestry, when they alternatively claimed that he was begotten by Śiva alone or by Devī alone, depriving him either of a father or of a mother. How was his divine birth to be reconciled with the abnormal and awkward combination in his body of man and beast. The least that could be done was to declare that this peculiarity was accidental and not congenital⁸.

Therianthropic deities are not unknown to other civilizations. No doubt Gaṇeśa made his entry into the world of things sacred under the guise of an elephant. It is not clear whether Gaṇeśa should be looked upon as a derivative rather than an original deity⁹ and whether he was originally a yakṣa¹⁰; his name does not occur in any of the lists of Yakṣas such as that in the *Mahāmāyūri*.

The definite fixation of Gaṇeśa's type is supposed to have taken place

³ M. K. Dhavalikar, *op. cit.*; «Gaṇeśa Beyond the Indian Frontiers», *India's Contribution to World Thought and Culture*, ed. Lokesh Chandra and others, Delhi.

⁴ This is carved in low relief in the rock cut temple at Kung-hsien which can be dated on the basis of inscriptional evidence to 531 A. D.

⁵ R. G. Bhandarkar, *Vaiṣṇavism, Saivism, and Minor Religious Systems*, Strassburg, 1913, p. 148.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

⁸ A. Foucher, «Introduction» in Alice Getty's *op. cit.*, p. xx.

⁹ Getty, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

¹⁰ A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Yakṣas* (2 parts), Washington, 1931, pt. I, p. 7.

towards the beginning of Christian era¹¹. The army of Māra on the northern pillar of the western gateway of Sāñci (later half of 1st century B. C.) includes an elephant together with a boar, a buffalo, a goat, a horse, a lion; but all these demons have still retained their animal forms. Two centuries later at Amarāvati¹², one of the gnomes on the railing seems to bear an elephant head; however, the trunk and the tusks are missing. The Mathurā school provides a comparatively early likeness in which the trunk sweeps back in a broad curve but there is only one tusk, the right one, and that, too, is scarcely visible¹³. This could be taken as an archaic image of Gaṇeśa; this clumsy nudity however, as well as the lack of jewelry, gives one the impression that he had hardly risen from the rank and file. A frieze of late Āndhra style discovered in Sri Lanka shows a more advanced stage deification in which Gaṇeśa is represented full-faced crouching between two rows of goblins eagerly bringing him food and drink¹⁴.

II. The evidence of the Indo-Greek Coinage

As early as 1953–54 when I was working on the Indo-Greeks my friend A. D. H. Bivar showed me a slide of a coin of Hermaeus on the reverse of which a Zeus-like figure, seated on a throne, had an elephant-face; the trunk was so clear. But then, neither of us was enthusiastic about publishing it because we thought that it could be either a freak or one of the degenerate pieces of the last days of the Indo-Greeks. Bivar gave the slide to me and it has lain with me since then.

The coin is in the British Museum¹⁵. Everytime I examined it I felt tempted to publish it but I did not want to be hasty. I was still waiting for either more specimens to appear or some weighty reason to shake my reluctance. Finally, when M. Bernard sent me photographs of some copper rectangular coins of Agathocles found in Ai-Khanoum, my reluctance gave way and I presented a paper at the Paris session of the International Congress of Orientalists in 1973, discussing the Ai Khanoum coins as well as the Hermaeus coins with elephant-faced Zeus suggesting that it could be the beginning of Gaṇeśa's iconography. While publishing a summary of part of the paper related to Gaṇeśa, in the *Paranavata* volume, I promised to write a fuller article later¹⁶. The reason why I

¹¹ Foucher, *op. cit.*, p. xix.

¹² Foucher, *loc. cit.*

¹³ Foucher, *loc. cit.*

¹⁴ Foucher, *op. cit.*, pp. xix-xx.

¹⁵ British Museum coin collection, No. 1961-3-2-1. It weighs 2.15 gms.

¹⁶ A. K. Narain, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

was encouraged by the Ai Khanum coins was that it provided a very positive evidence of the role of the Indo-Greeks in making bold experiments with anthropomorphic representation of Brahmanic deities even from the earliest stages of their history. These coins thus more than strengthened the evidence of the Besnagar inscription¹⁷ about the participation of the Indo-Greeks in the formulation of Indian cults and icons.

The coin of Hermaeus may now be described as follows:

Obverse: Diademed bust of king to right.

Greek legend: *Basileus Soteris Ermaioy*

Reverse: A male deity with elephant face, trunk to his left, (tusks not visible), with rayed headdress, seated on high-backed throne, holding a sceptre in the left hand; right hand extended and shown in what may be called *abhaya mudra*.

Kharoshthi legend: *Maharajasa tratarasa Hermayasa*

Monogram in r. field.

Pl. I. 1 (same size)
I. 2 (enlarged)

The curved trunk (the *vakratunda*) of the elephant face is so clear that one cannot but take this therianthrope figure as an attempt to represent an elephant-faced (or headed) deity. The only such deity which comes to mind is the one who became known later in the whole of South Asia, and even in other parts of Asia, as Ganeśa, among many other names. Could it not be the first attempt at the iconography of Ganeśa? Just as other experiments or attempts were being made by the Indo-Greeks (and later by other foreign ethnics who were not bound by mere symbolic representations of Indian gods and goddesses) arising out of cultural interaction and syncretic tendencies in art and religion¹⁸. What is more is that this representation of Ganeśa on the coin of Hermaeus is not the beginning of a process but the end of the phase of early development of the cult and iconography of Ganeśa. The process in fact starts a hundred years or more before Hermaeus.

We must first go back at least to Antialcidas if not before. The date of Antialcidas is 115–110 B. C.¹⁹ and his ambassador, Heliodorus, to the court of King Bhāgabhadra of Central India, had become a Bhā-

¹⁷ D. C. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions Bearing on Indian History and Civilization*, Vol. I, Calcutta, 1942, pp. 90–91.

¹⁸ E.g., the Ai Khanum coins of Agathocles.

¹⁹ A. K. Narain, *The Indo-Greeks*, Oxford, 1957, reprint 1980, p. 18.

gavat. As noted earlier the main coin-type of Antialcidas²⁰ shows on the Reverse the following:

Zeus, laureate, seated left on throne; holds in right, Nike, who bears wreath and palm; in left long sceptre; in field on left, forepart of an elephant with bell around neck, raising its trunk.

Pl. II. 1

There are several varieties of this type²¹ (Pl. II. 2–9). In some the elephant is shown facing Zeus, in others walking away from Zeus but grasping the wreath in his raised trunk; sometimes it is shown carrying off the wreath from Nike; and sometimes the whole figure of elephant is shown upwards in miniature. No doubt this coin-type was designed as a 'composite' one and which could not be treated complete without the inclusion of elephant, in almost equal terms with Nike. Its significance becomes clear when one discovers another coin-type of Antialcidas²² the Reverse of which may be described as below:

Elephant marching left with small figure of winged Nike on its head (like a Mahout) and grasping the wreath in its trunk; Zeus with sceptre walking to left by the side of elephant.

Pl. II. 10

This coin brings the three constituents of the 'composite' type further close and leaves no ground for any doubt whatsoever about their meaningful relationship. The elephant is clearly shown marching victoriously with one of its forelegs lifted upward. Zeus has been dethroned and is shown walking by the side of elephant. The conflict vaguely shown on the main coin-type of Antialcidas seems to have been resolved in the second coin-type. A rapprochement between the Greek god Zeus and the local worshipful animal-deity has taken place. It is difficult to say who won and who lost. On the one hand, it seems that the elephant has become a vehicle (*vāhana*) of Zeus just as the bull was of Śiva shown on the coins of Wima Kadphises²³. On the other hand, both the elephant and Zeus seem to show equality of status because the latter is dethroned and the elephant is shown marching with success or victory on its head.

While discussing the "difficult problem" of the 'joint' coin of Antialcidas and Lysias, W. W. Tarn noted²⁴,

²⁰ P. Gardner, *The Coins of the Greek and Scythic Kings of Bactria and India*, reprint, Chicago, 1966, pp. 25–28, pls. VII and VIII.

²¹ *Ibid.* See also illustrations.

²² R. B. Whitehead, NC, 1923, pl. XV. 5.

²³ Gardner, *op. cit.*, p. 124, pl. XXV. 6.

²⁴ W. W. Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria and India*, Cambridge, 1951, p. 314.

The important thing is that at some period Lysias was able to coin in a Greek mint, but all the mints known were in the hands of Antialcidas or Strato; at the same time the elephant on Lysias' coins (which might, however, be the elephant of Taxila), and more especially the little elephant on his aegis (which cannot well refer to Taxila), have been interpreted – in the latter case there seems no alternative – to mean that he regarded himself as under the protection of the elephant god of Kapisa.

Tarn thought further that this 'joint' coin referred to "a rapprochement, probably a treaty of permanent peace between the two factions, the end of the long feud of the rival houses; Lysias must have kept his hill kingdom but became in some form an associate – it could not be here sub-king – of Antialcidas, as he henceforth coined in his mints. This treaty may be the reason why coins exist which show Antialcidas wearing the flat Kausia of the Euthydemids and Lysias wearing the helmet of Eukratides; and an *unexplained coin* of Antialcidas, on which the elephant god and his elephant are marching, might relate to the same event, which would doubtless have been celebrated with some sort of a display or procession. The reason for such a reconciliation is obvious: the Saca menace was already coming into view"²⁵.

I have already examined the so-called 'joint' coin of Antialcidas and Lysias and have not only rejected its political implications but have agreed with Whitehead in treating this coin as a 'mule' rather than a 'joint' coin²⁶. Also, while discussing the main type of Antialcidas coinage consisting of enthroned Zeus Nicephorus and an elephant in different poses, I noted, firstly, that "it can no longer be connected with the enthroned deity of the *Kaviśiyenagara* coin of a certain Eucratides", and secondly, going further in analysing the association of elephant and Zeus on the coins of Antialcidas, that "the elephant is so common on Indo-Greek coins that it is hardly possible to give much importance to it – that the composite type of Antialcidas is only the result of artistic experiment and variations"²⁷. I did not rule out also the possibility of elephant being a *vāhana* of Indra and noted that "as the Iranian Mithra and Zeus are often confused on the Indo-Greek money, might we suggest that the Antialcidas' type represents a Greek god with attributes borrowed from Indian mythology, or even an Indian god depicted in Greek style"²⁸. Also, while discussing the *Kaviśiye nagara devata* coins I had doubts if the city deity shown on it was a male god at all and wondered if it could

²⁵ Tarn, *op. cit.*, p. 314.

²⁶ Narain, *op. cit.*, p. 116 ff.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, loc. cit.



(Obverse)

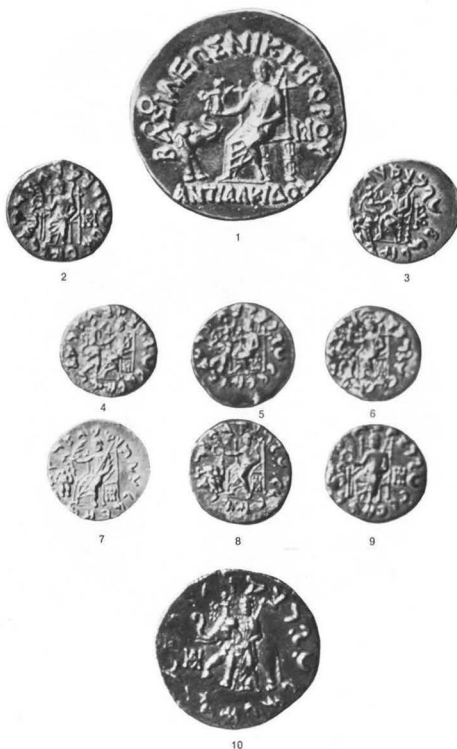


(Reverse)



2

(Reverse)



not be a female²⁹. Now, all these coin-types seem to me to acquire new meaning in the context of the Hermaeus coin described above. But before I return to discuss their significance and present my revised conclusion it may not be out of place here first to remind ourselves about the use of elephant on the Indo-Greek coinage from the very beginning of the time the Bactrian Greeks reached south of the HinduKush.

Antimachus Theos (190–180 B. C.) is among the first of the Bactrian Greeks to issue rectangular/square copper coins on the Indian pattern and add an epithet to the usual Basileus³⁰. The epithet he chose was *Theos* and the device he chose for his Indian coins was elephant. It is interesting to note that, although his main coin-type on the Attic tetradrachms depicted Poseidon, the Indian style square copper with elephant on one side showed a winged thunderbolt, an attribute of Zeus. It may be noted that Zeus himself in person is not shown but is represented only by his attribute, perhaps deliberately to keep him in a low profile. Again, on some round copper coins of Antimachus the full bodied elephant is shown on the obverse with Nike, a subsidiary of Zeus symbolising success and victory, on the reverse³¹. The other early king to use elephant is Demetrius (I and/or II)³². On his square copper, which shows a step further in the process of Indianisation because it bears bilingual legends, Demetrius is shown wearing an elephant scalp; he also adopts the epithet of *Aniketos*, meaning invincible, with its translation *Apadīhataśa* or *Aparajitāśa* in the Indian Prakrit of the region³³. This coin, too, shows a winged thunderbolt on the reverse and not the full representation of Zeus in person who is shown on the bilingual silver money of Demetrius, and on which the elephant scalp on the head of the king is replaced by a *kauśia* of the type worn by Antimachus Theos³⁴. In addition, on some round copper coins issued by Demetrius a full elephant head, with a bell hanging round its neck, is shown independently on the obverse with a caduceus on the reverse³⁵.

I have already discussed the family and political implications of these

²⁹ Narain, *op. cit.*, pp. 62–63, pp. 120–24.

³⁰ Gardner, *op. cit.*, p. 12, pl. V. I.

³¹ M. Mitchiner, *Indo-Greek and Indo-Scythian Coinage*, London, 1975, VI. I. p. 75.

³² For a discussion of the identity of the Demetrius of the bilingual coins see A. K. Narain, *op. cit.*, pp. 50; also Chs. II and III *passim*.

³³ A. K. Narain, *The Coin Types of the Indo-Greek Kings*, Chicago, 1976, p. 6; Mitchiner, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

³⁴ R. B. Whitehead, *NC*, 1923, pl. XIV. XIV. 2; A. K. Narain, *op. cit.*, p. 7; Mitchiner, *op. cit.* 61.

³⁵ Gardner, *op. cit.*, pl. III. 2; Narain, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

coins elsewhere³⁶. But here, I may now draw attention to some points of significance which could be relevant to our discussion later. Firstly, that the moment the Bactrian Greeks entered areas south of the Hindu-kush they found it necessary to mint some Indian-style copper coins on which they used, on the one hand, either the figure of elephant or symbolically, its head or even its scalp as a headress and, on the other, they were shy, at least in the beginning, to show the figure of Zeus himself and therefore represented him only either by his attribute thunderbolt, or by Nike, a subsidiary agent, which was quite in line with the Indian tradition of representing gods and goddesses symbolically or indirectly rather than in human form. Secondly, the elephant was recognised as a worshipful object as one can note from the bell around its neck. Thirdly, this sacred elephant or the elephant deity, in the south of the Hindu-kush, was adored as a symbol of success and victory; therefore, in using the elephant motif the new entrants in the territory were not only announcing their success and victory but also showing respect to the local sacred element and thereby their piety and thus justifying the adoption of such titles as *Aniketos* in the case of Demetrius and *Theos* in that of Antimachus; they were not only invincible but also righteous. Fourthly, the elephant is shown in association with Zeus' symbol and subsidiary agent of victory, Nike, right from its first appearance on the Indo-Greek money.

Now we may return to the *Kaviṣiye nagara devata* coin and the coins of Antialcidas and Hermaeus referred to earlier. Elsewhere I have discussed in detail the attribution of the *Kaviṣiye nagara devata* coins as well as the identity of the deity on it³⁷. Two things still stand out clear to me. One, that it was not a coin issued by Eukratides I but by a later king. And two, that whoever is the deity represented its association with the city of Kāpiśi on the one hand, and with elephant and a mountain symbol on the other cannot be denied. Whether the deity of the city was male or female, and if male whether it was the Greek god Zeus or the Indian Indra, are questions which have been discussed earlier by many including me³⁸. But now in the light of new evidence and after having reexamined very large blown up photographs I must first reject the female identity of the deity. Rapson had rightly noted that this deity represented the 'elephant-god' connected with Kāpiśi as mentioned by the Chinese traveller Hsüan-tsang. What remains to be settled out of the old discussion is whether this 'elephant-god' is in any way to be identified with Zeus or with Indra.

³⁶ Narain, *The Indo-Greeks*, ch. III.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 62-64, 123-24.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

J. N. Banerjee was the proponent of the Indra theory. According to him Indra appears in the garb of Zeus on the coins of many of the Indo-Greek and Saka kings. Following the suggestion of Rapson about the 'elephant-god' of Kāpiśi and accepting the interpretation of Watters in regard to the transliteration of *Si-pi-to-fa-la-tzu* as the Sanskrit *Śvetavatālaya* he thought that the Kāpiśi deity was Indra, the tutelary deity of Indrapura, a city listed in the *Mahāmāyūri*, which was identified by him with *Śvetavatālaya*. But Banerjee's theory does not stand my scrutiny. For this I must first quote from Watters' edition of Hsüan-tsang's travels; in the *Ka-pa-shih* section, after the description related to the hostage princes sent to Kaniska, it reads as below³⁹:

Above forty li south from the capital was the city called *Si-pi-to-fa-la-tzu*. When the rest of the region was visited by earthquakes and landslips this city and all round it were quite undisturbed.

Then there is a reference to the *A-lu-no* Mountain situated at a distance of above 30 li from this city followed by a description of "a great Snowy Mountain on the top of which was a lake, situated above 200 li north-west from the capital; prayers made at it for rain or fine weather were answered". After a long description of a legend about this lake and its Dragon-kings there is a short description of an "Old King's Monastery which had a milk-tooth one inch long of *Sakya Pu-sa* "situated" to the north-west of the Capital on the south bank of a large river". And it is after this that it reads as below⁴⁰:

To the south-west of the capital was the *Pi-lo-sho-lo* Mountain. This name was given to the mountain from its presiding genius who had the form of an elephant and was therefore called *Pi-lo-sho-lo*...

It is very clear from Hsüan-tsang's account that *Si-pi-to-fa-la-tzu* and *Pi-lo-sho-lo* are two different place names in two different directions. One is situated south of the capital and the other is south-west of it. One is the name of a township and the other is that of a mountain. So *prima facie* there is no ground to mix up the two and one may reasonably reject Banerjee's theory based on the transliteration of *Si-pi-to-fa-la-tzu*, and its *tour de force* identity with Indrapura, as irrelevant to our discussion of the elephant-god on *Kaviṣiye nagara* coin. I may, however, add few remarks here before returning to *Pi-lo-sho-lo*. Banerjee has accepted Watters' transliteration of the Chinese name and not the ones suggested

³⁹ Thomas Watters, *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India*, London, 1904, p. 126.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

by Julien or Saint Martin, i.e., *Sphitavaras* and *Śvetavāras* respectively⁴¹. Watters' argument in suggesting *Śvetatālaya* was that he thought the last Chinese character was probably used "in the sense of a 'temple', i.e., *ālaya*". On the one hand I feel inclined to agree with Julien's *Sphitavaras* as phonetically more reasonable, and on the other Watters' idea of 'temple' cannot be substantiated from anything in the text referring to *Si-pi-to-fa-la-tzu*, which is called a 'city' and not a 'temple'. Banerjee's identification of the so-called *Śvetatālaya* with Indrapura is also not easy to accept. If the Chinese were in fact giving a transliteration of the place-name they could have given the Chinese version of Indrapura itself and not of its secondary *Śvetatālaya*. Moreover, the location of Indrapura, as mentioned in *Mahāmāyūrti*, is vague; its association with Varṇu does not help because that only locates it near Bannu⁴².

There is thus no justification in identifying the 'elephant-god' with Indra. It is noteworthy that no independent statue or terra cotta representation of Indra has been so far reported from Afghanistan⁴³. Also, it is no more than a facile assumption that Zeus was the Greek counterpart of Indra, the Indian king of gods (*devarāja*).

Now, could the deity on the Kāpiśi coin be Zeus? The answer is not easy. The attributes like thunderbolt, eagle, aegis, etc., of Zeus repertoire which one usually finds on the early Indo-Greek coinage are not visible here. The only attribute one can associate, that too indirectly, with the Zeus repertoire is the palm of Nike an auxiliary goddess of the Zeus complex. But as we will note this was deliberate. Even the gesture of the extended right hand is not a peculiarity of the early Indo-Greek depictions of Zeus. The headdress, too, which looks like a turreted crown resembles more the crowns worn by the City deities on later Indo-Greek and Saka coins than any headdress on Greek gods. As against all these the two prominent items, the forepart of elephant and the miniature mountain, which have certainly no meaning in the Zeus iconography, indicate clearly the connection of the deity with the presiding genius of Pi-lo-sho-lo a mountain in the suburb of Kāpiśi. In fact the presiding genius himself was known as Pi-lo-sho-lo. Who knows the city name Kāpiśi itself was derived from this elephant-god because *kāpi* in Sanskrit means elephant. The Greeks, from the time of Alexander, were always

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 126. J. N. Banerjee, *The Development of Hindu Iconography*, 2nd ed., Calcutta, 1956, p. 148.

⁴² See A. Cunningham's *Ancient Geography of India*, ed. by S. Majumdar Sastri, Calcutta, 1924, pp. 97-99; Hsüan-tsang referred to this place as Fa-la-na.

⁴³ P. Banerjee and R. C. Agrawala, «Hindu Sculptures in Ancient Afghanistan», *India's Contribution to World Thought and Culture*, pp. 215 ff.

impressed by elephant and for the Buddhists of Kāpiśi elephant was also a sacred animal being associated with the nativity of the Buddha. One is reminded of the Aśoka rock sculpture at Dhauri where the forepart of an elephant juts out of a rock and the inscription labelling it reads *gajātame* (= the most sacred elephant). Who knows the Indo-Greeks themselves decided to treat the 'elephant-god' as the tutelary deity of Kāpiśi? The importance of 'elephant-god' is evident from Hsüan-tsang's description that⁴⁴:

While the Julai was on earth this god once invited him and the 1200 great arhats to his mountain, and there on a large flat rock he gave the Julai worship and entertainment. On this rock king Aśoka afterwards built a tope above 100 feet high. This tope, which was supposed to contain about a pint of the Buddha's relics, was known to the people at the time of Yuan Chuang's visit as the Pi-lo-sho-lo tope...

There is no such complexity in the transliteration of *Pi-lo-sho-lo*. Watters agrees with Julien that the Chinese word stands for *Pilusāra* and no one has doubted it. In Chinese it has been translated as 'elephant-solid'; in Sanskrit it may stand for 'elephant-essence' and as Hsüan-tsang notes "this name was given to the mountain from its presiding genius who had the form of an elephant".

Thus the *Kaviśiye nagara devata* need not be identified with either Indra or Zeus. He is just the Elephant-god, *Pi-lo-sho-lo*, like the *Gajātame* of Dhauri. It is significant to note here that *Pi-lo-sho-lo* = *Pilusāra* can be compared with *Pilīaiyar*, the Dravidian name of Gaṇeśa current even now in southern India.

But the development of the early iconography of Gaṇeśa, the Pilusāra of Kāpiśi and Pilīaiyar of southern India had to pass through several phases covering more than one hundred years which may be reconstructed as follows:

First phase: When Antimachus I Theos (190-180 B.C.) and Demetrius II Niketos (189-165 B.C.) moved successfully south of the Hindukush they wanted to convey their 'righteous' and 'invincible' image to their new subjects. They were impressed by the popularity of the Elephant-god in the suburb of Kāpiśi. They might have been even told that their success was because of the grace of the Elephant-god. So, when they issued copper coins of Indian style for local usage selected, very wisely for their coin-types, the sacred Elephant along with the Thunderbolt, an attribute of their own god Zeus.

The sacredness of elephant was recognised also by such other early

⁴⁴ Watters, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

kings as Menander (155–130 B. C.), Heliocles II (120–115 B. C.) and Archibius (130–120 B. C.), who ruled in the Kabul valley and they used elephant on some of their copper money.

Second phase: By the time of Antialcidas (115–100 B. C.) the process of acculturation had advanced and the Indo-Greek kings were getting more and more localized. Antialcidas, who took the title of Nikephorus on his coins, followed the idea of his predecessors in associating the local Elephant-god with Zeus and or his attributes. He brought the two closer and placed them on the same side of the coin. His artists designed a very significant composite type in more than one variety and associated the idea of success and victory with it suggested by the king's adoption of the epithet Nikephorus. This became quite a popular coin-type and was issued in more than one denomination. Later, his artist moved a step further toward synthesis; he made the deity in human form, the so-called Zeus, walk with the marching elephant. With this model the so-called Zeus ceased to be, in effect, Zeus, and became Pilusāra with his elephant visibility and with victory as his quality.

Third phase: When one of the last Indo-Greek kings, an Eukratides III (?), perhaps only of local importance, minted some square copper coins honoring this local deity, he announced it as the City deity of Kāpiśi. While he followed the model of Antialcidas' coins he removed some of the Zeus trappings and even the figure of Nike, and introduced the Pi-lo-sho-lo Mountain itself in miniature leaving no doubt whatsoever about the identity of the god. But the Palm, the symbol of victory, success and peace was kept in the hands of the deity.

This coin-type has a monogram which at once links it in time and space, as I have pointed out elsewhere, to some coins of Hermaeus, with whom we enter the last phase of the early development of Gaṇeśa iconography.

Fourth Phase: It was left for an unnamed but ingenious artist of Hermaeus, the last Indo-Greek king (75–55 B. C.) to take the last step toward a synthesis. Gods with animal faces and animals with human faces were not unknown in antiquity; it needed only a bold artist to come forward with an idea; the ground had already been prepared. It resulted in merging all elements and giving the city-deity an elephant face. It was certainly an experimental piece and it took some time before the model acquired popularity. The Pi-lo-sho-lo, the Pilusāra or the Pīlāiyar became an artist's delight in due course of time. Legends, myth and cults developed around this Elephant-god of Kāpiśi in various parts of Asia indicating various roles. The association of mountain remained one of the core parts of the myth in many places and the deity's quality to bestow success assured his popularity transcending even sectarian boundaries. It is not

without significance that among the earliest sculptures representing Gaṇeśa in a fuller form two have been found in Afghanistan; the credit to draw our attention to them goes to Prof. Giuseppe Tucci, in whose memory I feel privileged to contribute this paper.

POSTSCRIPT

Joe Cribb, in an article in the *Numismatic Digest*, 1982, pp. 30–32, has expressed his disagreement with me in regard to the visibility of elephant's trunk on the coin of Hermaeus. According to him "another photograph of the same coin in the BM lit from a different angle shows a different picture" and that "when viewed alongside other coins in the name of Hermaeus it can be seen that the trunk has disappeared". He also at the end refers to another specimen of the coin in the American Numismatic Society Collection in New York and observes that "it shows the same features as the BM coin, the elephant trunk" effect is visible if the coin is held to the light at one angle, but disappears otherwise" and so "once again it is the accidental structure of the surface of the coin and not the die engraver's hand which has created this confusing effect". I agree with Cribb that "It is clearly dangerous to base interpretation of a coin such shaky grounds".

But as I have already said I waited for many years and have examined the coin every time I have been to the BM and so far as I am concerned the picture of the elephant's trunk on the specimen in the BM is clear in my eyes. The photograph which I have used was given me by A. D. H. Bivar who had the same impression as I had but we were waiting for more specimens to appear before publishing it. B. N. Mukherji who has also seen the coin told me that he also thought that the elephant's trunks was clearly visible. Cribb, too, mentions that my photograph and his own "with the same lighting certainly appear to correspond" to my description. Now, I am not an expert in photography and I cannot comment on the lighting devices. But I do trust my eyes even though I use glasses. I have also checked the American Numismatic Society Collection specimen to which Cribb has referred and I do not think that as another specimen of the coin in question; this means that the BM coin is still unique, for what ever worth it is, and must be considered on its merit. I also note that P. L. Gupta in his editorial note to Cribb's paper agrees with me. During a Conference at Nasik in 1983 Mr Maheshwari thought that at least one tusk, perhaps broken, can be seen on the enlarged photograph. Perhaps future discoveries of more specimens may settle the matter conclusively but this does not minimise the importance of unique coins for historical interpretation.